



DEPARTMENT ON DISABILITY SERVICES  
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES ADMINISTRATION  
HEALTH CARE BULLETIN  
Issued: February 12, 2009

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February is American Heart Month

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**Audience:** All

Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the United States and is a major cause of disability. Coronary heart disease is the most common form of heart disease and often appears as a heart attack. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "in 2009, an estimated 785,000 Americans will have a new coronary attack, and about 470,000 will have a recurrent attack". That means that about every 25 seconds a person will have a coronary event and about once every minute someone will die from a coronary event.

Steps can be taken to prevent or control factors that put people at greater risk. Knowing the signs and symptoms of heart attack are crucial to the most positive outcomes after having a heart attack. Knowing what the risks are can also reduce the risk of a second heart attack.

A number of conditions affect your heart or increase your risk of death or disability. These include: arrhythmia, heart failure, and peripheral artery disease (PAD). High cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, tobacco, and secondhand smoke are also risk factors.

**Know the Signs and Symptoms**

Some heart attacks are sudden and intense; however, most heart attacks start slowly, with mild pain or discomfort. Often people affected aren't sure what's wrong and wait too long before getting help.

***Signs that can mean a heart attack is happening:***

- Chest discomfort. Most heart attacks involve discomfort in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back. It can feel like uncomfortable pressure, squeezing, fullness, or pain.
- Discomfort in other areas of the upper body. Symptoms can include pain or discomfort in one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- Shortness of breath. May occur with or without chest discomfort.
- Other signs. These may include breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea, or lightheadedness.

**"Act in Time"** is a new campaign to increase people's awareness of heart attack and the importance of call 9-1-1 immediately at the onset of heart attack symptoms.

**Diet and Nutrition**

A healthy lifestyle and diet are the best ways to fight heart disease.

- Choose lean meats and poultry without skin and prepare them without added saturated and trans fat.
- Select fat-free, 1%, and low-fat dairy products.



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- Cut back on foods containing partially hydrogenated vegetable oils to reduce trans fat in your diet.
- Cut back on food high in dietary cholesterol. Aim to eat less than 300 mg of cholesterol each day.
- Cut back on beverages and foods with added sugars.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Aim to eat less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day (or less than 1,500 mg if you are in a higher risk group for high blood pressure).
- If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation. That means no more than one drink per day if you're a woman and two drinks per day if you are a man.
- Keep an eye on portion size.

**Physical Activity**

- Physical activities in your daily life are important in preventing heart disease. Increase your physical activity each day.

**Women and Heart Disease**

Women account for 52.6 percent of the total heart disease deaths. Heart disease is perceived as an "older woman's disease," and is the leading cause of death among women 65 years and older. However, heart disease is the third leading cause of death among women aged 25-44 and the second leading cause of death among women 45-64 year.

Well-Integrated Screening and Evaluation for Women Across the Nation (wise woman)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/wisewoman/>

**Men and Heart Disease**

The average age for a first heart attack for men is 66 years.  
Almost half of men who have a heart attack under age 65 dies within 8 years.  
Between 70% and 89% of sudden cardiac events occur in men.

Studies suggest that a 10% decrease in total cholesterol levels may reduce the development of coronary heart disease by almost 30%.

Men's Heart Health [http://www.cdc.gov/DHDSP/library/fs\\_men\\_heart.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/DHDSP/library/fs_men_heart.htm)

**Additional information and resources:**

American Heart Association  
<http://www.americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=1200000>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
[http://www.cdc.gov/DHDSP/library/fact\\_sheets.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/DHDSP/library/fact_sheets.htm)

US Department of Health & Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality  
<http://www.ahrq.gov/>

\*Information for this bulletin provided by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

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